

JANKO KERSNIK

ZBRANO DELO

Tretja knjiga

KMETSKÉ SLIKE / TESTAMENT
ROSLIN IN VRJANKO / JARA GOBODA



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Janko Kersnik (1852–1897)

Like a few other Slovene writers, Prešeren among them, Kersnik wrote first in both German and Slovene, but eventually he switched exclusively to the latter. As a notary and politician, he had extensive contact with all layers of Slovene society in the second half of the nineteenth century, and he portrayed them in a realistic way. He wrote poetry and both short and long prose works. Notable among his novels are: *Ciklamen* (1883, *The Cyclamen*), *Agitator* (1885, *The Canvasser*), and *Jara gospoda* (1893, *The Parvenus*); some of his best short stories are in *Kmetske slike* (1882–91, “Peasant Pictures”), from which “Kmetska smrt” (“The Peasant’s Death”) is taken. The Slovene text is from Janko Kersnik, *Zbrano delo*, vol. 3 (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1951) 63–69; the English from *The Universal Anthology* 29 (1899): 325–30.

Kmetška smrt

Stari Planjavec je bil še trden mož, dasi je gospodaril že nad trideset let na svojem lepem, obširnem posestvu. Življenje njegovo je teklo, kakor teče pač veliki večini, da ne vsakemu kmetškemu gospodarju: v prvi mladosti »pol joka, pol smeha«, potem v mladeniških letih doma dela toliko, kolikor je ravno treba; ob žegnanju in ob semanjih dneh malo več vina v glavo, ponoči pa malo vasovanja in malo tepeža; nato pride ženitev in svoje gospodarstvo in ž njo in ž njim vred—skrbi, pa dela vedno več in več; kako nedeljo ali praznik zvečer romata še polna steklenica in prazen kozarec iz roke v roko, pa čez noč je vse prespano, vse veselje, vse hripavo petje, vse zabavanje, in delo je zopet tu in skrb za pridelek in imetek. Tako pride starost in ž njo želja po počitku. Sin je dorasel; suče se že v drugem oddelku onega kolobarja, katerega završe vsi gospodarji na Planjavi od rojstva do groba; sedaj ob žegnanju že pleše in daje za vino in tepel se je tudi že nekolikokrat; da tudi vasuje, to se razumeje samo ob sebi. Temu sinu torej se izbere nevesta, žena, stari pa leže k počitku: najprej v kot za široko, vedno toplo peč, a potem skoro, skoro venkaj v hladni vrtič okrog bližnje cerkvice svetega Marka.

Dejali smo, da je bil stari Planjavec še trden mož; zato mu ni hodilo na misel, preopustiti posestvo enemu izmed treh sinov ali pa, kakor se je bilo že zgodilo na Planjavi, vzeti zeta v hišo; saj je imel tudi hčer, ki je bila že za možitev. Stari je hotel še sam delati in skrbeti, dokler je bilo kaj moči. Le nekaj ga je storilo časih čemernega in zamišljenega; od mladosti že je imel bolezen, samo ob sebi ne nevarno, ki se tudi ni pogostoma pojavljala, a gotov ni bil nikoli, ni doma ni v cerkvi, ne, ako je nakladal voz sena, vrhu njega stoječ, ne, ako je šel po ozki brvi, držeči čez bližnji potok. Bôžje ga je metalo, čeprav ne pogostokrat, ali kakor smo rekli, gotov ni bil nikdar.

»Ubil se bodem ali pa bodem utonil!« dejal je časih, toda navzlic temu je vendar mirno in ravnodušno hodil čez brv ali pa lezel na streho, kadar je bilo treba popravila. »Kakor mi je namenjeno!« tolažil se je potem z onim fatalizmom, ki ga je toliko med kmetškim ljudstvom.

Bilo je jeseni, ko je stari Planjavec znova—menda tretjič v dveh dnevih—ogledoval gola rebra na slamnati strehi svoje hiše.

The Peasant's Death

Old Planjavec was still a sturdy man, although he had been farming more than thirty years on his beautiful, extensive possessions. His life had run as runs the life of the great majority if not all of the peasants farmers: in his childhood 'half weeping, half laughing'; later in his youth, he worked just as much as was necessary; on church holidays and market days a little more wine in his head, in the evenings a little loafing and a little fighting. Then came marriage and his own estate, and together with them, troubles, and ever more and more work; on a Sunday or holiday evening a full bottle and empty glass wanders from hand to hand, and through the night all is forgotten in sleep,—all jollity, all hoarse singing, all playfulness, and work is again here, and worry about crops and property. Thus came old age and the desire for rest. He had a grown-up son; he was moving in the second phase of that circle which all the peasants on Planjava run from the cradle to the grave: on church holidays he goes to dances and drinks wine, and he has already had a few fights, and that he runs after girls is a matter of course. They are now on the lookout for a bride and wife for this son; and the old man will take a rest, at first behind the broad and warm stove, and soon, very soon after, outside in the sold garden near the neighboring church of St. Mark.

We said that old Planjavec was a sturdy man; that is the reason why it did not occur to him to turn over his possessions to one of his three sons, or, as is the custom on Planjava, to take a son-in-law to his house, for he had a marriageable daughter. The old man wanted to work and worry himself as long as his strength held out. But there was something that made him at times angry and thoughtful: he was troubled from childhood with dizziness, which did not affect him often, but of which he was never sure, neither at home, nor at church, nor when he was loading hay on the wagon, nor when he was crossing a narrow plank over the brook. He would then get a fit of epilepsy; which indeed did not happen often, but as we said, he was never sure of himself.

"I'll either be killed or drowned!" he would say at times, and yet, in spite of it, he would coolly proceed to cross over the plank or to climb on the roof when it needed repairing. "I can't escape my fate!" he used to console himself with that fatalism which is so common among the peasants.

It was in the autumn when old Planjavec noticed again, for the third time in two days, the naked girders on the thatched roof of his house.

»Prekriti, zakrpati se mora!« dejal je, vzel s police pri oknu zakrivljen nož, velel sinu Antonu, naj pripravi nekoliko škopnikov ržene slame, sam pa je šel gor v breg do meje, ki je krožila njivo in kjer je raslo med robidovjem dokaj mladih belokožnih brez. Pod grmovjem prav na rumenem laporju je slonelo mnogo suhe praproti. Te je starec nabral, malo zmel, vložil jo v nizko kotlino kraj njive, nanjo pa vrgel nekoliko suhe jelkovine in smrečja, nalomljenega gori više v melji, ter praprotino vžgal. Skoro je plapolal ogenj iz kupa, na katerega je Planjavec še venomer nalagal goriva, in gost, bel dim se je iz pokajočega smrečja valil v dolino. Zdaj je starec vzel nož ter rezal brezovino, trebil posamične šibe in jih metal na kup kraj ognja. Ko je uvidel, da jih bode dovolj, jemal je zopet vsako posebe s kupa, držal jo nad plamenom in vil v trto; saj je bil sam vse za svoj dom: oratar, tesar, kolar in krovec. Nocoj je hotel luknje v strehi prekriti in za to je potreboval brezovih trt, da priveže slamo ob prekle.

Bil je že malone gotov s trtami; ozrl se je dol proti domačiji, je li Anton tudi pripravil škopo; nagnil se je preko plamena in zavil z desnico trdo brezovo šibo okoli roke.

Kar mu je zašumelo v glavi.

»A-a-a-ah!« zajecal je in po vrojenem nagonu porinil se stran od ognja; a stal je v gorenjem bregu in opotekel se je zopet nazaj.

Božje ga je vrglo. Pal je z obrazom naprej, telo malo v stran na desno držeč, roke pa pomolivši predse. Obe roki sta prišli v plamen, v žerjavico, a on ničesar ni čutil, in da bi bil tudi, moči ni imel več, potegniti jih nazaj. Krč je bil prehud in izgubil je zavest.

Vtem je sin Anton, ki je bil ravno privlekel slamo pod kap, ozrl se gor proti meji ter videl očetov padec. Glasno kričeč je tekkel gor, za njim še sestra in dekla in potegnili so očeta iz ognja. Tudi hlapec je pritekkel, drugih sinov ni bilo doma, in prenesli so starca v hišo, na posteljo. Mati Planjavka je hotela pomagati, ali nji je slabo prišlo. Sedaj je svetoval eden to, drugi to, toda roki sta bili tako opečeni, da si nihče ni upal prijeti jih.

»Kislega zelja in ajdove moke dajte okoli,« svetoval je hlapec.

V sili je vsak svet dober. Storili so tako, močili starcu glavo in skoro se je zavedal. A sedaj je tulil od grozних bolečin.

“It must be re-covered and patched up!” he said. He took from the shelf near the window a crooked knife, and told his son Anton to get a few bundles of rye straw. Then he went up a hill to a hedge that crossed the meadow, and where there grew among blackberry bushes some young white birches. Under the bushes and on the red marl there lay a heap of dry ferns. The old man collected them, crushed them somewhat, placed them in a small depression at the edge of the meadow, covered them with some dry pine and fir twigs that he gathered a little higher up in the hedge, and set the ferns on fire. Soon a flame burst out of the pile, and Planjavec kept putting on more twigs, and the thick white smoke from the smothered pine was carried down into the vale. Then the old man took the knife and cut the birch bushes with it, cleaned the withes one by one, and threw them down in a heap near the fire. When he saw that he had enough, he picked them up one by one, held them over the fire, and wound them into rings. He was everything in his house: farmer, joiner, wheelwright, and thatcher. At night he meant to cover the bare spots on the roof, and he needed the birch withes with which to tie the straw to the slats.

He was almost through with the rings, and he looked down toward the house to see whether Anton had gotten the bundles ready. He bent over the fire, while with his right hand he was twisting a tough birch with around his hands.

Suddenly he grew dizzy. “A-a-a-ah!” he cried out, and with an unconscious impulse he turned away from the fire; but he got only to the edge of the burning heap, and again he tried to pull himself away.

He was seized by a fit of epilepsy. He fell face downward, his body twisted a little toward the right, and his hands extended before him as if in praying. Both arms were in the fire, on the hot coals; but he did not feel anything, and if he did, he did not have enough strength to pull them back. He was dreadfully contorted and lost his consciousness.

At the same time Anton, having brought the straw to the roof, looked up toward the hedge and saw his father’s fall. Crying out loud, he ran up-hill, followed by his sister and the maid, and drew the father out of the flames. Then the farm hand came up,—the other two sons were not at home,—and they carried the old man to the house and placed him upon the bed. Mother Planjavec wanted to help, but she felt too weak. Then one counseled this, and another that, but the arms were so badly burned that nobody dared to touch them.

“Put sorrel and buckwheat flour around it!” was the farmhand’s advice.

In a calamity every advice is good. They did so, and put cold water on the old man’s head, and he soon came to. He groaned terribly from the frightful pain.

Poslali so po duhovnika in po ranocelnika. Prvi je bil prišel prej, potem drugi. Starec ni mogel več vpiti, ampak apatičen je bil bolj in bolj. Spovedal se je in, ko ga je potem ranocelnik za silo obvezal, kakor je pač znal, ležal je mirno vznak in le časih, ko so bolečine prihajale neznosne, izvil se mu je hripav: »Uh-uh-uh« prav iz prsi.

Ranocelnik je odhajajoč postal malo na stopnicah pred vežo in Anton mu je odštél plačilo.

»Ne vem, bode li kaj z očetom ali ne! Umrlí bodo skoro gotovo!« menil je zdravnik in potegnil rameni kvišku. Hči je na glas zajokala, sin Anton pa ni izpremenil lica, niti zinil besede.

Pozno na večer je bilo, ko so vsi domačini okrog očetove postelje. Tudi nekaj sosedov je bilo navzočnih.

»Nesreča, to je nesreča!« zmajeval je z glavo sosed Češek. »Umrlí bodeš, Planjavec—umrlí—tega noben padar ne ozdravi.«

»Saj je tudi ta, naš—tako dejal!« pritrdil je Anton.

Starec je čul te besede, pa nizo mu bile strašne; nasprotno—kakor tolažilo so mu zvenele.

»Uh-uh-uh,« zajecal je; ali to je bil le dušek telesnim bolečinam.

Mati Planjavka je čepela na klopi pri peči, pa jokala ni več; edino hči je še časih zaihtela. Mati je sosedu Češku pošepetala nekaj na uho.

Nekoliko časa pozneje je Češek zopet odprl usta.

»Planjavec—kaj—ko bi po može poslal? Dobro je, če človek uredi, kar je treba.«

Starec se je ozrl z medlim očesom vanj.

»Kaj praviš?« dejal je.

To je bilo prvo vprašanje, prvi govor po duhovnikovem odhodu.

»I—po može pošljimo—testament napravi!« vpil je Češek in poskusil se nasmehniti. »Saj tako—ni nič—vse ni nič!« pristavil je polagoma, pa nihče ni vedel, kaj ni nič ali kaj misli sosed s to besedo.

»Katere pa hočete?« vprašal je Anton, ko oče ni odgovoril.

»Češek je tu,« rekel je bolnik počasi, »potem pa Bunček.«

»Še eden mora biti,« silil je Češek, ki je bil zvedenec v takih stvareh.

Planjavec je premišljal.

»Kaj pa Kodrè?«

Planjavec je molče odmajal z glavo.

»Ta je baba,« zinila je hči.

They sent for the priest and the doctor. The priest came first and then the other. The old man could not even cry, and grew more and more apathetic. He made his confession, and when the doctor bandaged his arms as best he could, he lay quietly on his back; and only when his pain became intolerable, there issued from his breast a hoarse "Uh-uh-uh!"

Before going away, the doctor stopped for a moment on the hall steps, and Anton paid him his fee.

"I do not know whether there is much chance for your father! I rather think he will not outlive it!" said the physician, and shrugged his shoulders. At these words the daughter sobbed out loud, but Anton did not change his face nor utter a word.

It was late in the evening when the whole family gathered around the father's bed. There were also present a few neighbors.

"A misfortune, it is a misfortune!" said Češek, and shook his head. "You will die, Planjavec, you will die! Nobody can cure that fit."

"That's what the doctor said!" confirmed Anton.

The old man heard all this discussion, but it was not terrible to him. On the contrary, it sounded to him like a consolation.

"Uh-uh-uh!" he groaned, but that was only an expression of his bodily pain.

Mother Planjavec was sitting on the bench near the stove, but she no longer wept; only the daughter sobbed from time to time. The mother whispered something into Češek's ear.

A little later Češek again opened his lips.

"Planjavec, would it not be better to send for some men? You know it is best to settle things as is proper."

The old man looked at him with dull eyes.

"What do you say?" he asked.

That was the first question, his first conversation, since the priest had gone.

"Oh,—let us send for some men,—to get your will!" called out Češek, and tried to smile. "Just so,—it's nothing, it's nothing!" he added slowly; but nobody knew what was nothing, or what the neighbor meant by that speech.

"Who do you want?" asked Anton, when his father did not answer.

"Češek is here," said the sick man after a while: "well, then Bunček."

"There has to be one more," Češek insisted, for he was experienced in such things.

Planjavec thought for a while.

"What about Kodre?"

Planjavec shook his head in silence.

"He is an old woman," spoke out the daughter.

»No pa—Mrtinkovec?«

Bolnik je pritrdil kimajoč in pol ure pozneje so sedeli vsi trije sosede v sobi in tlačili in vžigali svoje pipe-vivčke.

»Oh, oh, oh!« vzdihoval je venomer Mrtinkovec in »umrl bode, umrl bode,« trdil je glasno Češek.

»Kako pa bodeš—Planjavec?« vprašal je Bunček.

»Uh-uh-uh!« dejal je ta in položil glavo po strani proti zidu.

Od domačinov je samo Planjavka ostala v sobi; otroci in posli so bili šli venkaj po opravkih, ki so si jih kar izbirali.

Nekoliko trenutkov je bilo tiho v sobi, le od ure poleg vrat se je čul enakomerni: »Tik, tik, tik.«

Bolnik je prvi izpregovoril.

»Zemljišče naj bode Antonovo,« dejal je počasi in v odmorih, »drugim po osem sto, Miciki pa še kosilo in posteljo in skrinjo, če se omoži—«

»Torej bališče?« vprašal je Češek.

»Ne, samo posteljo, pa skrinjo!«—

Potem so zopet vsi molčali.

»Pa pokopati me mora—z dvema gospodoma!«

»In za svete maše?« vpraša Bunček.

»Sto goldinarjev za rimske maše pa za cerkev tudi petdeset goldinarjev!«

»Pa za sedmino?« oglasil se je Mrtinkovec.

»Tudi sedmino mora napraviti.«

»Kar reci—koliko!« silil je Mrtinovec, ki je že sedaj požiral sline v mislih, kako se bode jelo in pilo na sedmini.

»Bo že vedel in bode—vedel!« zavrnil je bolnik, ki je govoril vse razločno, dasi pretrgano.

Molčali so sedaj, akoprav jim je bilo vsem še nekaj na jeziku.

In ker nihče sosedov ni zinil, oglasila se je Planjavka tam izza peči.

»Kaj pa meni?«

»Materi pa—doto, ki jo ima v zemljišču, in pa živež do smrti—pa—kot—pa—obleko—«

»In drugega nič?« zajavkala je starka. »Torej za to sem se trudila in delala kakor črna živina?«

Spustila se je v glasen jok.

»Saj sem se jaz tudi!« vzdihnil je Planjavec.

»Da me bodo na stare dni od hiše podili! To sem prislužila!« tarnala je ženica.

Pa nihče izmed mož ni imel razuma za nje bolelost.

»Kaj pa dolgovi,« deje Češek, »je li kaj dolga?«

“Well, then, Martinkovec?”

The sick man nodded assent, and half an hour later the three neighbors sat in the room. They filled and lighted their pipes.

“Oh-oh-oh!” Martinkovec kept on sighing, and “He’ll die, he’ll die,” Češek repeated aloud.

“How do you feel, Planjavec?” asked Bunček.

“Uh-uh-uh!” he said, and placed his head sideways, towards the wall.

Of all his family, only Mother Planjavec remained in the room. The children and servants went out to attend each one to some work.

A few minutes it was quiet in the room, only from the clock near the door came the monotonous “Tick, tick, tick.”

The sick man was the first to speak.

“The land is to be all Anton’s,” he said slowly and with pauses, “the others are to get eight hundred each, and Micika—board and bed, and coffer when she gets married.”

“That is, the trousseau?” asked Češek.

“No, only bed and coffer!”

Then all were again silent.

“And you may bury me with two carriages.”

“And for the holy mass?” asked Bunček.

“Hundred florins for the Roman mass, and to the church here fifty florins.

“And for the wake?” Martinkovec spoke out.

“You may celebrate a wake.”

“But say, how much?” insisted Martinkovec, who was swallowing the spittle at the thought of eating and drinking at the wake.

“Leave it to him, he will know!” retorted the sick man, speaking distinctly, though with interruptions.

They were all silent, although they had still something on their minds.

And when none of the neighbors uttered a word, Mother Planjavec spoke out from behind the stove:—

“What for me?”

“To mother her dower in the land, and her sustenance until death, and—room, and—her dresses—“

“And nothing else?” the old woman whimpered; “is that what I have been working for like a mule all my life?”

She burst out in a loud cry.

“So did I!” Planjavec sighed.

“In my old age they will drive me out of the house! That’s what I have earned!” she sobbed.

But not one of the men had any feeling for her sorrow.

“What about debts?” said Češek; “are there any debts?”

»Saj ve vsakdo zanj!« mrmral je bolnik. »Cerkvi je tri sto goldinarjev pa Juretovemu Pavlu za usnje petnajst goldinarjev in Gostinčarju polpeti goldinar na pijači!«

Sosedje so kimali; za cerkveni dolg so znali vsi, za druga dva ne, ali vedeli so, da je to vse. Planjavec je bil trden kmet.

»Torej meni nič več? Dejala je mati še enkrat.

»Dosti bode imel plačevanja!« mrmral je Planjavec. »Kje bode jemal?«

»To je moje plačilo! Beračit, prosjačit pojdem—»

»Uh-uh-uh!«—zatulil je bolnik na glas.

Hči Micka je stopila v sobo in skoro za njo še drugi; poznali so, da je oporoka gotova.

Planjavec je zopet v steno gledal. Mraz ga je jel izpreletovati, sprva polagoma, potem vedno silneje, da se je postelja tresla.

»Umr! bodem!« rekel je zdajci na glas in krčevito izkušal se vzkloniti kvišku.

»Luč, luč!« vpila je dekla. »Molite, molite!« velel je Bunček in mati Planjavka je pričela moliti na ves glas; vsi so pokleknili po tleh, samo Anton na klop ob peči. Preden so izmolili nekaj očenašev za verne duše v vicah, imel je Planjavec vse zemeljske skrbi in bolečine za sabo. Ženske so jele jokati, moški pa so se razšli na vse kraje.

Sedaj živi Antonov rod na Planjavi; trd in mehak, surov in nežen, krepak in zdelan, samogolten in dobrosršen, dober in slab—kakor si ga ogledaš. Pa kadar mrjo ti ljudje—jaz sem jih že videl mreti—smrti se ne boje!

"Everybody knows about them!" murmured the sick man. "To the church three hundred florins, to Juretov Pavl for leather fifteen florins, and to Gostinčar four and a half florins for drinks!"

The neighbors nodded: they all knew about the church debt, and not about the other two; but they were sure that was all, for Planjavec was a careful man.

"So nothing more for me?" the wife repeated her question.

"He will have enough to pay out!" murmured Planjavec. "Where shall he take it from?"

"That's my pay! I shall have to go a-begging —"

"Uh-uh-uh," the old man cried out aloud.

Micika, his daughter, stepped into the room, and soon after the others came; they knew the will was made.

Planjavec looked again at the wall. A chill passed over him, at first only lightly, then stronger and stronger, so that the bed shook.

"I am dying!" he spoke suddenly aloud, and made a cramp-like effort to raise himself.

"A candle, a candle!" cried the maid. "Pray, pray!" ordered Bunček, and Mother Planjavec began to pray aloud. All knelt on the floor; only Anton knelt on the bench near the stove. Before they had recited a few Lord's Prayers for the faithful souls in Purgatory, Planjavec passed through all earthly woes and sufferings. The women began to weep aloud, and the men went away.

* * *

Anton's family lives now on Planjava: hard-hearted and soft, austere and gentle, strong and ailing, avaricious and liberal, kind and mean,— according to how you look at them. But when these people die,—I have seen them die,—they are not afraid of death!

Leo Wiener